DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 351 RC 015 233

AUTHOR Swiderski, Michael J.
TITLE Outdoor Leadership Competencies: A Research Study Surveying Outdoor Leaders.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the American Camping Association Convention (San Diego, CA, February 27-March 3, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Job Skills; *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Minimum Competencies; *Outdoor Education; Safety; Skill Analysis
IDENTIFIERS United States (West)

ABSTRACT

The study identified land-based outdoor leadership competencies deemed necessary by outdoor leaders in the western United States. Using resources such as outdoor leadership literature, competency-based teacher education manuals, consultation with outdoor leadership specialists in educational, private, and governmental agencies, and personal outdoor leadership experience, a list of 50 outdoor leadership competencies was developed. The list was sent to 282 outdoor leaders, administrators, and educators who ranked the importance of each competency. The return rate was 52.5% (148). Six weeks after the initial mailing, data were analyzed using a six-point Likert-type scale. Competencies were prioritized and ranked in order of importance using the statistical mean for each competency statement. Thirty-four competencies were ranked "extremely important." Among these were: exercise good judgment and common sense while performing duties as a leader under stress and pressure; handle situations which pose potential safety problems; foresee and be prepared for situations in which problems and accidents might occur; and prevent illness or injury but if either occurs, recognize and apply proper procedures and controls to stabilize or improve the ill or injured person's condition. Of the last 16 competencies, 14 were ranked "of moderate importance" and 2 were ranked "not important." (NQA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED255351

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES:

A RESEARCH STUDY SURVEYING OUTDOOR LEADERS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael J. Swiderski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

APR 1985
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

by

Michael J. Swiderski, Ph.D.*

Paper presented at the American Camping Association Convention (San Diego, CA, February 27-March 3, 1984).

RC015233

*Dr. Swiderski is Assistant Professor at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. He has taught outdoor education/recreation and has lead outdoor pursuits for over ten years at the University of Southern California and University of Oregon. He is the former Director of the University of Southern California's Outdoor Adventure Program and is a member of the local and county Search and Rescue Units.

THE PROBLEM

Advertisements for outdoor clothing and equipment suggest that the out-of-doors is the idealistic respite from our urban survival. And so, the consumers come to the out-of-doors in ever-increasing numbers equipped with modern technology yet unequipped physically and intellectually to cope with this totally foreign environment of which they have little or no knowledge. The problem associated with uneducated or untrained wilderness users often leads to unacceptable impacts on wilderness areas. The experts in outdoor education and recreation circles seem to be in common agreement to solutions to these problems. This agreement regards the importance of quality leadership for groups entering backcountry areas and changing the behavior of backcountry visitors.

The review of literature suggests a need for certification of outdoor leaders and outdoor training programs for wilderness users. Many outdoor educators, experts and leaders in the field believe certification of outdoor leaders is inevitable. Paul Petzoldt, in a lecture at the University of Oregon in 1980 stated that, "Fifty percent of the hiring agencies will require this (certification) five years from now."[1] In Cousineau's study of 1977, it was stated that:

> . . . enough precedents have been created in the past decade to lead us to believe that certification of leaders is part of the normal process of institutionalizing innovative ideas in education.[2]

Certification would indeed attempt to control the quality of leadership but much needs to be done before certification can be accepted. Cousineau suggests that an agency comprised of outdoor educators identify the level of competence required for acceptable outdoor practitioners.[3]

As of now, there is no one official national validating or accrediting agency recognized by experts to assume the role of certifying outdoor leaders. Futhermore, there are no recognized outdoor leadership standards developed for outdoor leadership education.

Another problem with certification of outdoor leaders is the diversity of competencies in assessing land-based leadership. This raises the question, "What competencies should land-based outdoor leaders possess?"

Based on the problems of wilderness users and their need for competent leadership, the purpose of this research was to identify land-based outdoor leadership competencies deemed necessary by outdoor leaders in the western region of the United States.

LIST OF OUTDOOR LEADERS

Since there was no comprehensive list of outdoor leaders available, one had to be generated to select the survey respondents. College catalogs were reviewed to determine institutions offering outdoor living skills. Telephone directories and advertisement brochures were used to locate outdoor recreation agencies. The Association of Experiential Education Membership Directory[4] was employed to select respondents and respondence by letter and telephone was conducted with administrators, directors, coordinators and leaders of outdoor programs. Monthly periodicals were reviewed to select agency participants and a list of outdoor leaders was generated by two other researchers which aided in participant selection. After compiling a mailing list of names and addresses, 282 outdoor leaders, administrators and outdoor educators were identified to participate in the study. Confidentiality and non-identifiable responses were assured.

LIST OF COMPETENCIES

A preliminary task was to develop a comprehensive list of outdoor leadership competencies. This list was developed using resources such as outdoor leadership literature, competency-based teacher education manuals, consultation with outdoor leadership specialists in educational, private and governmental agencies and input from personal outdoor leadership experience. A preliminary list of 48 outdoor leadership competencies was drafted.

These 48 competency statements were then pilot tested by 30 outdoor leaders, educators and administrators who were chosen by the researcher because of their outdoor concerns and leadership experience. Through the pilot test, the questionnaire was evaluated to determine clarity and understanding of the competency statements and to determine if any competencies were omitted. The results of the evaluation indicated a need for two more competencies, making a total of 50 statements.

THE STUDY

The survey instrument was sent to the 282 participants. They were asked to give their opinions on the importance of each of the 50 competencies of land-based outdoor leaders. A six point Likert-type of scale was used for measuring responses. For each competency, the respondents circled the number on the continuum that best indicated their opinion on the importance of the competency. The return rate was 52.5% (148).

Six weeks after the intial mailing of the instrument, the data was analyzed. The competencies were prioritized and ranked in order of their importance. The statistical mean for each competency statement was used to determine the rank order of importance for each.

THE RESULTS

The following 34 competencies were ranked "extremely important" and "mandatory" for an outdoor leader. They are listed below in the order of their importance.

1. Exercise good judgment and common sense while performing duties as a leader under stress and pressure.

2. Handle situations which pose potential safety problems.

3. Foresee and be prepared for situations in which problems and accidents might occur.

4. Prevent illness or injury but if either occurs, recognize and apply proper procedures and controls to stabilize or improve the ill or injured person's condition.

5. Teach causes, prevention, symptoms and physiological effects of environmentally related injuries and illness which may include, but not be limited to, hypothermia, frostbite, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, high altitude and fluid intake.

6. Follow a personal ethic which displays sensitivity and concern for the wilderness, reflected in everyday practices consistent with accepted and sound environmental values.

7. Generate respect, interest, humor, enthusiasm, confidence and commitment through actions, feelings and demonstrations.

8. Demonstrate minimum impact off-trail campsite selection and differentiate between low and high impact areas.

9. Recognize and assess own limitations, plan group activities accordingly and seek to improve abilities.

10. Recognize the indicators of potential physiological and psychological problems.

11. Demonstrate off-trail route finding and navigation which may include, but not be limited to, route selection, triangulation, navigation with map only, route finding in poor visibility, and calculation of speed over varied terrain.

12. Follow effective lifesaving and water rescue procedures in emergency situations.

13. Clarify the importance of the appropriate method of solid waste disposal.

14. Evaluate and assess physical, mental and emotional strengths and weaknesses of individuals and groups which may include, but not be limited to, physical handicaps, medical problems, physical conditions, skill levels, personalities and desires.

15. Maintain control of the group with emphasis on noise, sanitation, littering and inter-group conflicts.

16. Maintain excellent personal physical and mental condition.

17. Demonstrate proficiencies in teaching knowledge, skills and attitudes to others.

18. Demonstrate how to read a map, use a compass and teach these skills which may include, but not be limited to, map scales, contours, descriptions of ground from topographical features on map, walking a bearing, plotting a course and measurement of distances.

19. Demonstrate compliance with land management regulations.

20. Employ good judgment in aquatic safety procedures which may include, but not be limited to, when and where to ford rivers, river-crossing and stream-crossing techniques.

21. Display a proficiency in organizational skills.

22. Demonstrate when and how to treat water for drinking purposes.

23. Employ appropriate emergency survival skills which may include, but not be limited to, shelter construction, water procurement, fire building, improvising navigational instruments and food gathering.

24. Clarify the importance of proper equipment and clothing which may include, but not be limited to, selection, cost, care, repair, improvising, storage, use, qualities and style.

25. Interpret weather phenomena and implications of the effects of weather on the comfort and safety of the group which may include, but not be limited to, reading signs of changing weather, regional patterns, seasonal variations and mountain influences.

26. Apply principles of group management and security while traveling.

27. Demonstrate healthful menu planning on the basis of nutrition, taste, bulk, weight, storage properties, packaging, cost and ease of preparation.

28. Utilize communication and listening skills to enhance teaching and leading capabilities.

29. Illustrate awareness and knowledge of avalanche hazards and forecasting which may include, but not be limited to, terrain and weather factors and avalanche survival.

30. Demonstrate safe driving procedures and maintain a safe driving record.

31. Demonstrate safe use of backpacking stoves for cooking in all types of weather.

32. Follow mountain rescue procedures which may include, but not be limited to, ground searches, crevasse rescue and avalanche search and recovery.

33. Analyze the dynamics of group problem solving and initiate group decision making.

34. Practice proper trail walking technique which may include, but not be limited to, pace, breathing, foot placement, courtesy, conservation of energy and balance.

The following 14 competencies were ranked "of moderate importance" and "may be needed" by an outdoor leader. They also are listed in the order of their importance.

1. Illustrate correct principles of packing and carrying one or more types of packs which may include, but not be limited to, size, balance, weight and displacement.

2. Practice resourcefulness and economical consumption of firewood.

3. Interpret ecosystems, geology, history, culture, flora, fauna and wildlife of the area of travel.

4. Practice snow/ice techniques which may include, but not be limited to uses of the ice axe and crampons.

5. Construct shelters in an emergency using materials such as tree limbs, boughs and ground cover.

6. Practice snow travel techniques which may include, but not be limited to, cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing.

7. Illustrate awareness and knowledge of crevasse hazards.

8. Teach rope handling which may include, but not be limited to, coiling, tossing and knot tying.

9. Demonstrate procedures in rappelling and setting anchor systems which may include, but not be limited to dulfersitz, carabiner brake, multiple rappels, natural and artificial anchors.

10. Teach climbing signals and belaying procedures.

11. Construct snow shelters for enjoyment and survival which may include, but not be limited to, trenches, igloos and caves.

12. Demonstrate proper bouldering techniques which may include, but not be limited to, three points of contact, low center of gravity and friction principles.

13. Illustrate the capability of cooking over an open fire.

14. Demonstrate the proper use of campcraft tools such as the axe or saw.

The following two competencies are "not important" and "not needed" by outdoor leaders. They are also listed in the order of their importance.

1. Introduce and teach fishing techniques to outdoor participants.

2. Demonstrate proficiencies in teaching hunting and trapping techniques and the care and preparation of wild game.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Across the United States a number of outdoor leadership training agencies and institutions employ and/or train potential outdoor leaders. At a time when there is a need for highly trained, competent outdoor pursuit leaders, there seems to be a lack of solidarity on the components of what constitutes high quality outdoor leadership.

The overbearing priorities of outdoor pursuit leaders are safety of group participants and a healthy awareness of attitude toward environmental conservation. Since the field of outdoor leadership education is

relatively new, few competency requirements beyond elementary safety and environmental concerns have been considered by outdoor pursuit leaders.

It is hoped that this study will assist outdoor leaders, agencies and administrators in the following areas:

* Development of outdoor leadership standards.
* Be an aid in the development of leadership training manuals.
* Assist in leader self-evaluation.
* Be an employer's tool in the evaluation and hiring of outdoor leaders.
* Be used as a guideline for outdoor leadership education.
* And more than anything else, the results of this study should be of some value as we cope with the question of outdoor leader certification in the near future.

---

[1]Petzoldt, P., Outdoor Leadership - Why Certification is Needed Now. Presentation given at the University of Oregon, April 1, 1980.

[2]Cousineau, C., A Delphi Consensus on a Set of Principles for the Development of a Certification System for Educators in Outdoor Adventure Programs. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Colorado, 1977.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Association of Experiential Education, The Association of Experiential Education Membership Directory, 1979-1980.